

Messengers from a New Place

Elaine Shizgal Cohen offered the following words on the occasion of her daughter's commitment ceremony last year

The truth is that for many of us, including Steve and me, this celebration of a commitment ceremony is a first. And it's very powerful that it is our first-born daughter's celebration that we are consecrating this evening.

Tamara's *parasha* when she became a bat mitzvah was *Shlach Lecha*. In it we read about the scouts who go into the land to explore a new place. We know that the majority came back saying that it was a terrifying place. But there were two who said, "This place is good." This is a place of opportunity and beauty and the future.

And so it has been with our scout, Tamara, who has brought us to this place and taught us that it is good.

We are here with all of you in fullness—fullness of spirit, fullness of mind. The hagada that Tamara compiled and edited a few years ago for Ma'yan is called *The Journey Continues*. And, indeed, for us it has been a journey to reach this place. A journey that began with awareness, moved to recognition, through acknowledgment and acceptance, culminating in an open embrace. And this journey will continue. On her way and through the new land, of course, Tamara brought Gwynn to us. We could see immediately her qualities of fineness, caring and integrity. Over the years we came to see and appreciate her very loving side too, and how you, Gwynn are a very rooted and anchored person who complements wonderfully Tamara's fluctuations of spirit. As your mother, Tamara, I say with pleasure that you have been—and continue to be—my teacher, as you are a teacher and an inspiration to so many of us in this room, and we take such great pride in you.

Were my mother were here today, I know that she would be joyful, celebrating and feeling very avant-garde! I asked Grandma—Steve's mother—who is here with us, "How do you think Grandpa would have dealt with this, on

his journey, Tamara marrying a woman?" And she said, with all of her practical wisdom, "He would have had to!" And you know, I think he would have. And, even at this joyful time, we are very sad that my father could no longer make meaning of his experience, let alone the experience of others. But one thing I know about him is that he loves his granddaughters, and I am confident that despite his decline he continues to.

So as we move along this journey, I want to recall two *brachot*; first, the blessing said when you hear a thunderstorm. Sometimes, it's hard in the midst of a storm to remember that there is a blessing to recite even at a time of fear and confusion, that God's power and presence fill the whole world always.

When Phyllis called up people for *aliyot* this morning, she invited those who saw themselves as exhibiting the quality of tenacity. I am one of them. And I think that you know, too, that my love is anchored in tenacity and holds on through stormy episodes as well as peaceful times. My huge love for you can still grow, and it will continue to grow.

This evening's celebration includes many who identify as "rainbow people," and I want to close with remembering that the *bracha* of the rainbow is *zocher habrit*. God remembers God's covenant with all the people of the world, and we are enjoined to expand and exemplify our

humanity in a covenantal relationship with the Divine under the arching symbol of the rainbow. You are leading us to enlarge our hearts to become fuller, better, and more open people so that we each can help partner with God and remember the Divine promise of making this world a place where all will live a life filled with love, dignity and embrace.

Let's all raise that glass together and toast Tamara and Gwynn and this moment of love and sanctification.

L'chaim!



L-R: Elaine S. Cohen,
Tamara Cohen,
Stephen P. Cohen